

A Brief History of St. George's Lodge no. 15

St. Catharines, Ontario - Established 1814

Introduction of Masonry in Niagara

Freemasonry was introduced to the Niagara area in 1792 with the arrival of the Kings or 8th Regiment of Foot under a travelling warrant No.156 of the Grand Lodge (Ancients) of England.

While some historical accounts have St. George's Lodge founded in 1816 after the war of 1812, anecdotal evidence however indicates that R.W. Bro. George Adams, one of the founders of St George's Lodge and Grand Master of the schismatic Grand Lodge, put forth a petition to the First Provincial Grand Lodge on June 1st, 1814, to form a lodge at a place known as The Twelve or Shipman's Corner. The Lodge was to be known as St. George's Lodge. Historical documents indicate that Lodges and Grand Lodges did not meet during the War of 1812. It is feasible that requested charters for the formation of a Lodge would not be issued until sometime after the war, given communication methods of 200 years ago.

In the very early years of St. George's Lodge existence, there was some disagreement of which jurisdiction lodges in the area were to be governed. St. George's Lodge carried the number 27 under the First Provincial Grand Lodge; number 9 and 791 respectively under the Grand Lodge of England (Ancients) as well number 15 under the Second Provincial Grand Lodge and the Schismatic Grand Lodge. When the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario was formed in 1855, St. George's Lodge was assigned and has retained since, number 15 as our official number.

Early Years

Little is known of the early years of St. George's Lodge. From 1826 to 1845 there was a decided lull in Masonic activity especially near the US / Canadian boundary due to what is now referred to as the "Morgan Incident". Also at this time, the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837 and low interest of Freemasonry in general caused many lodges, including ours, to cease operations temporarily. It was not until a year after the Third Provincial Grand Lodge was formed in 1845 that activities at St. George's Lodge were re-activated.

St George's Masonic Lodge predates the establishment of the City of St. Catharines in 1850. Many of the founders of our lodge were officers of Butler's Rangers, an elite British military unit during the war of 1812-1814. Officers of that militia unit settled in the area known as the Twelve or Grantham and Lincoln Townships, now known as the city of St Catharines. These men established businesses and professions and subsequently, pillars of the community. As it was in those days, many of the important and influential men in the community were also active with Freemasonry.

Prior to St. Catharines becoming a city, the leaders of the community were called "Presidents of the Board of Police". St. Catharines had two, both of which, Alpheus St. John, 1845 and Elias S. Adams 1846-1849, were also Masters of St. George's Lodge. Between 1850 and 1932, seven mayors of the city of St. Catharines were also Masters of our Lodge. No doubt that many other mayors, municipal councillors, important businessmen, doctors and lawyers back then and since have been members of St. George's Lodge. This is also evident by numerous street names throughout our city named after men that were Past Masters of our Lodge.

Meeting Places

Since its inception, St. George's Lodge has met in several places in St Catharines, beginning at Samuel Dobson's Tavern, a log tavern on Queenston Street. The then centre of the city at the intersection of St Paul and Ontario streets saw several buildings house the Lodge over the years including the Mittleberger Block with its' ornate pillars adorning the façade which are still a prominent feature of that building today. In 1954, after many years of contemplation and negotiations, St. George's Lodge along with several other lodges and concordant bodies in what is known as the Masonic Memorial Temple Association, renovated and moved into our present location at 23 Centre Street.

Interestingly enough, 65 years later, talks are again underway to either find a new home or alternatively rebuild a new Masonic Hall on the present site. Twenty-Three Centre Street is in dire need of extensive renovations to meet our needs and to conform to current building codes for such things as accessibility requirements.

Membership and Interesting Meetings

Membership at St. George's Lodge has varied greatly over the years however numbers went up significantly after the World Wars. Between the early 1940's to the late 1960's our lodge membership was fairly steady at just under 400

members. Today St. George's Lodge is quite proud of the fact that we have one of the top attendance averages in the province with 40% to 50% of our membership attending regular monthly Lodge meetings. Much like Masonry throughout Ontario our membership is near an all-time low of 54 in 2018. On a positive note, St. George's Lodge is a strong, active lodge, with many younger members guided by older experienced members. Several years ago, we adopted an extensive investigation process that has since been adopted by Grand Lodge that ensures that joining the fraternity in general and our lodge in particular is the right fit for both the candidate and our lodge.

Establishment of New Masonic and Concordant Bodies

St. George's Lodge is proud to have spawned sister lodges in St Catharines. On July 29, 1858, several members of St. George's Lodge met and formed Maple Leaf Masonic Lodge No. 103. Following this, members of the two lodges having attained the rank of Royal Arch Masons joined together and founded Mount Moriah Chapter of Royal Arch No. 19. On April 2, 1873, Temple Lodge No. 296 instituted. Of note here is that the first Master of Temple Lodge, Lucius S. Oille; initiated at Maple Leaf Lodge 103, became Master of St. George's Lodge 15 in 1867 / 1868 and then went on to be the 14th Mayor of the St Catharines in 1878.

Interesting St. George's Lodge Events or Facts

Between 1846 and 1912 sixteen men have served two years, four for three years and one, Frederick Parsons, served four years. Since the re-organization in 1846, St. George's has had 146 Worshipful Masters. In the fifty years between 1914 and 1964, only W.P. Holmes served a term of two years (1912 – 1914). Over the past 39 years we have had one, Brian Clement, serve three years and eight others serve two-year terms. Secretaries, however, appear to be a tough lot. Since 1846 we have had 44 secretaries with one, W. Bro. Albert Lindsay, serving 44 years from 1893 to 1937. Two others have had notable long terms, Charles Hesburn, 1937-1952 (15 years) and Walter Thompson 1958- 1972 (14 years).

Corona Virus, 2020

St. George's Lodge held its' last regular meeting on March 10, 2020, due to the pandemic known as Covid 19. The virus hit not only Ontario but the entire world. Canada and much of the world was shut down on March 12, 2020. Grand Lodge suspended all Masonic meetings and activities, and they remain closed for the foreseeable future. All Lodge Officers remain in place until such time as lodges are allowed to be open. This included the DDGM and District Secretary. As of this writing, eighteen months later, we are still restricted from

in person meetings. Many Lodges including St. George's Lodge have adapted to virtual meetings utilizing a program known as ZOOM. We are lucky to have some young innovative members at St. George's Lodge who have adapted to the situation in order to keep our Masonic life alive. Events such as virtual Wine Tasting with the winemaker describing the wines and answering questions. This was a friends and family event. We have also had some virtual Craft Beer tasting events and since the golf courses have opened up, we recently had a St. George's invitational golf tournament at the oldest golf course in Canada. Golfers from several lodges in the district provided teams to make this a very successful and enjoyable day.

NOTE: Our first "in person" meeting return to Lodge after COVID occurred on March 22, 2022

Anniversaries

We do not have records of our celebrating historical anniversaries such as 100 or 125 years. This may be due to the fact that in 1914 (100th anniversary), the First World War was getting underway and in 1939 (125th anniversary), the Second World War commenced. Large ceremonious events however have been held and recorded for our 150th, 175th and most recently our 200th anniversary.

Active Lodge

St. George's is a very active and well-respected Lodge not only among the local Masonic fraternity but the community as a whole. In 2006 we commenced participation at the St. George's Anglican Church Breakfast program. We support this program to this day by manning the kitchen one day a month. The program serves over 30,000 meals annually, 365 days a year for those in need in our community. Not only do we contribute time in feeding the homeless over the past 15 years, but we also provided funds for the replacement of the gas stove, new toasters and refrigerators in the church kitchen. We also support both financially and through man hours, many great District charities. In fact, over the past 10 years more than \$100,000 has been raised for DDGM charities such as the Red Roof Retreat; Make a Wish Foundation; Wellspring Niagara and Children's Advocacy Centre; Niagara County Humane Society and Community Care programs.

St. George's Lodge members are not just hard-working men, but we do know how to host and have fun times. District wide highlight events such as our Spaghetti Fiesta and Casino Nights that took place during the 1990's which then morphed into the annual Chili Cook Off and Trivia Night which is a sold-out event each year. In 2011 our annual Festive Board was started whereby a

very formal Masonic dinner is served and top name speakers are invited which make this a highly sought after ticket item throughout the district year after year.

An annual golf tournament between Niagara 2, St. Andrew's 661 and St. George's 15 has turned into quite a rivalry as to who is to be awarded the coveted trophy. What is known as the "Battle of the Saints" has proved to be a great way to meet and enjoy the company of Brethren of sister lodges. During our 200th year, the Worshipful Master of St. George's Lodge created a Niagara A District ice hockey team known as the Maroons. Supported by the District Deputy Grand Master that year, the Maroons hosted several visiting teams from Hamilton and Toronto. The highlight that year was our team trip to Boston Massachusetts. The team is now in our fifth year and trips to Montreal, Philadelphia, Detroit etc. are highlights of both team members and their supporters.

Traditional Ladies Nights which for many years were formal dinners, speeches and dancing have since been replaced with a more up to date and varied night out with our special someone. The Shaw Theatre in Niagara on the Lake, a play at the downtown Performing Arts Centre, a Murder Mystery Night in Grimsby or a buffet dinner followed by a Wild Magic Show in Niagara Falls are now what attracts and piques the interest of today's Masons and their wives. Other smaller events during the year such as a father and son IceDogs Hockey Night, family ice skates, beer tasting tours of local craft breweries, family BBQ's and breakfast outings to name a few are what makes our Lodge one that is highly respected not only in Niagara but throughout the province.

R.W. Bro. David Gillis Version 2. - September 10, 2021